

December 8, 2006

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm  
Governor of the State of Michigan  
PO Box 30013  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Granholm:

When we read the October, 2006 draft, "Standards for the Emergency Use of Seclusion and Restraint and Recommended Strategic Directives," we applauded our State Board of Education for their strong leadership.

We have major philosophical and practical concerns regarding the November 28, 2006 revision. Philosophically, current research and best practice demonstrate that behavior is communication. When a student's behavior appears to be "out of control," that student is communicating distress. It is that distress that needs to be addressed. The distress might be that the student is experiencing physical pain that has neither been identified nor diagnosed nor treated or that the student is experiencing emotional pain due to not being treated with respect and has no other means to express that. The primary goal should be to identify the cause of the behavior, to respond in a constructive way, and then to support the student to change behavior because the communication has been listened to. This is what Positive Behavior Supports is all about.

The Michigan Department of Education developed excellent materials on Positive Behavior Supports and trained school personnel around the state for a number of years. When school personnel insist that seclusion and restraint are necessary, they are demonstrating that they either do not understand or have chosen not to implement best practices already made available through our State's efforts to provide them with up-to-date documented information and training.

The current draft is a manual for using restraint and seclusion and ignoring Positive Behavior Supports rather than the other way around. For example, this document calls for a person on the team who is knowledgeable about seclusion and restraint but does not require a person who is knowledgeable about Positive Behavior Supports.



No Child Left Behind requires evidence-based practice. We would like to point out that current evidence-based practice supports Positive Behavior Supports and does not support use of seclusion and restraint. We are concerned that if this draft is passed by the Board, it could be in conflict with current Federal law. At a practical level, we also find the November 28, 2006 draft to be confusing and poorly written.

We are terribly disappointed in this document and urge the State Board of Education to demonstrate leadership by reinstating the excellent document of October, 2006. In this way, the State Board of Education would reaffirm its commitment to the safety and dignity of all of our children and to the use of evidence-based best practice.

Sincerely,

Tom Lerchen  
Education Committee of  
The Arc Michigan Board of Directors